

[Dancing in the 1880s]

W13910

[Beliefs & Customs - Folkstuff]

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Title Dancing in the 1880's Columbia River salmon fishing

Place of origin Portland, Oreg. Date 12/7/38

Project worker Sara B. Wrenn

Project editor

Remarks [?]

Form A

Library of Congress

Circumstances of Interview

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker Sara B. Wrenn Date December 7, 1938

Address 505 Elks Bldg., Portland, Oregon

Subject Dancing in the 1880's. Columbia River Salmon Fishing.

Name and address of informant Charles L. DeLashmutt Route 1, Oswego, Oregon

Date and time of interview December 7, 1938

Place of interview Home of informant.

Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant No one.

Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you None.

Description of room, house, surroundings, etc. Small three-room house in enclosed area of about 100 x 100 feet, with considerable shrubbery about and outhouses in the rear. Small room, furnished in meagre manner — linoleum on floor, heating stove and a couple of chairs. Informant, a widower, lives alone.

Form B

Personal History of Informant

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Name and address of informant Charles L. DeLashmutt Route 1, Oswego, Oregon.

Information obtained should supply the following facts:

1. Ancestry
2. Place and date of birth
3. Family
4. Places lived in, with dates
5. Education, with dates
6. Occupations and accomplishments with dates
7. Special skills and interests
8. Community and religious activities
9. Description of informant

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10. Other points gained in interview

1. French and Irish.

2. Portland, Oregon, June 7, 1870.

3. Father, Russell T. DeLashmutt, from Missouri; born in France in 1820. Mother, Elizabeth Love DeLashmutt, from Virginia.

4. Portland, Oregon, 1870-1872; Oswego, 1872-1915; Altoona, Wash., 1915-1918; 1918 to present times Oswego, Oregon.

5. Common school.

6. Chiefly salmon fishing in Columbia river until 1918. Since 1918, for number of years a ranger in forest service.

7. Musician - pianist, and landscape gardener.

8. No religious affiliations. Brought up in Methodist church.

9. Tall, somewhat angular; intelligent.

10. Judged to be a man who has seen considerable of the seamy, adventurous side of life, with a capacity for enjoyment of whatever came his way. His house not particularly neat and no evidence of reading matter. Two dogs claimed a good deal of attention.

Form C

Text of Interview (Unedited)

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Text:

I am the only one living of eleven children, of which I was the youngest. I buried my only remaining brother last week. There were three of us boys of near the same age that played for the dances when I was young. One brother played the first violin, another the second and I played the piano. They danced mostly square dances in those days, though a good many round dances were popular too. Probably the mazurka was liked the best. We played for dances all over the country. Whole families in wagons and hacks and big crowds sometimes in hayracks would come, and they would dance all night.

I have a lot of the old music. I'll dig it out and send you. I have a book of Tony Pastor's old songs. You can have that too.

No, I can't remember there were ever any fights of consequence. Once in a while a fellow would get mad at another about his girl or something, and maybe they would scrap a little, but things generally went off pretty peaceably. They did their scrapping out of doors.

It was down on the Lower Columbia in the salmon fishing days that there was real trouble. That was in the early eighties. Among the fishermen were all sorts of nationalities — French, Italian, Russian and Indian halfbreeds. The 2 Italians were the worst. They always

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had a knife hid somewhere. The Russians were slow, easy-going fellows. One of the things that made it bad was the whiskey scows, big flat boats, loaded with whiskey that would anchor thirty feet from lowtide mark of the river and sell to the fisherman. That was on the north side, the Washington bank, but of course the fisherman from both shores got it. They had a license to sell, for which they paid \$25.00 a year, so it was all regular and everything, as long as they kept outside that thirty foot line. It was called the Columbia Barbary Coast, and I guess we had about as much Barbary Coast there as the old time Barbary Coast of San Francisco.

Fishermen made pretty good money in those days. That was when Hume was going strong. He used to pay a flat rate of 50 cents each for salmon. Later he paid 15 and 16 cents a pound. Sometimes we got as many as 50 and more salmon a night. Generally we fished at night, but if the water was muddy we fished during daylight. We used gill nets. In the beginning only big meshed nets were used — eight to ten inch mesh, just to get the big fellows of fifty, sixty and seventy-five pounds. Later the mesh got smaller. What they called the diver-and-cork line, that was dragged along the bottom. The fishing season or seasons, for they jumped from spring to autumn, so many months in each season, were longer then than they are now. There were times when my brother and I made as high as \$70.00 a night. We used to make our own nets. Now they cost as much as \$500.00.

It was when one fishing boat would cork another that trouble began. There were always two to a boat. They would have their net laid out all ready for the incoming fish when another boat would slip its net just below. They called that corking.

That is how Coffee Pot Island got its name. My brother Billy, who fished from 1876 until 1900, and his boat puller had their net all in place when another boat corked them. Billy and the other boat boss began to chew the rag, of course.

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Sometimes in a fracas of that sort one or the other would jump in his opponent's boat and they would fight it out — if they didn't get drowned. This time Billy said: 'Come on, we'll land here and settle this matter.' 'Here' was a little sandy island where the fishermen would land during the night to make their coffee over little fires. They had no facilities for coffee-making on their boats, as now. So they landed, and already a lot of little fires were going with pots of coffee boiling. Billy and his man fought with their fists, and Billy was getting the worst of it, till he managed to grab one of those boiling coffee pots and lammed his man across the head with it. They didn't go by any rules in fighting them days. In the boats they would fight with a salmon club or gaff, that they used to knock the salmon in the head with.

Those were the days, too, for the sailor boarding houses, when a man would be shanghaied — put on a boat, drugged or drunk, and make up to find himself bound for China and no way points. There was one man I know that had his own son shanghaied and taken to Europe. Thought it would be a lesson to him, since he was no good anyway.

Astoria was headquarters for sailor boarding house man Old Lady Grant and her two boys, Nace and Pete, and there was Larry Sullivan. I guess they're all dead now. Once I was in Astoria with a fellow just arrived from Minnesota, Lew [_____?] his name was, and he thought himself a tough guy. We went in the old Louvre, down on the water front. This Lew, after a drink, began to chew the rag with the bartender who happened to be Nace Grant. I didn't want any trouble, so I got this Lew out and we went up the street, but on the way back, as we passed the saloon Lew says: 'I'm going in and paste that bartender.' There was nothing I could do but go with him. Nace, who was pretty good sized, was just coming off his shift of work. He was rolling up his apron, when Lew faced him with some insulting remark. Nace didn't say a word. He just tossed his apron behind the bar and shot out his fist, and down went Lew on the floor, landing on his face and knees. Then Nace kicked him, turning him over, and was just going to let him have his boot again when I spoke up. Name asked, 'Is he as bad as he says. Has he got a gun?' I told him no, and he let Lew get up. Lew said 'I guess you're the best man. Everybody step up and have

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a drink an me.' And that was that. Nace Grant was chief of police in Astoria some years later, and he helped the brother of this man Lew to make a little money during one regatta. The brother was blind, and Nace let him have a peddling concession during the time of the regatta, without charging him a cent.

In the early 90s 90's we began to have labor trouble. In 1890 some scabs were killed by Union men, and in 1896 some Union man were killed by scabs. It was nothing very uncommon to find a man — a floater — in the river, who had came to a violent end. No great effort was made toward identification or getting the killer.

Form D

Extra Comment

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Comment:

No doubt there are more stories of the eighties that could be obtained from Mr. DeLashmutt, many of them probably of a character not too common. He is more than

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willing to tell of incidents, and what he tells is undoubtedly authentic, since his dates tie up with history.